

**TEACHING ABOUT CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT
IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES:
THE CHILD SOLDIER CRISIS**

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“The issue of child soldiers has been going on for far too long and in far too many places and it is time to bring a stop to it. Even America used child soldiers during the civil war and 13 countries still use them today. I believe that the first step to creating a change is to get people educated.... I acquired a strong understanding of the facts as well as an understanding of why child soldiers are considered both victims and perpetrators. Prior to this event (a presentation on child soldiers) I had not considered the challenge of reintegrating the children back into normal life and thought that the psychological aspect of reintegration was very interesting.... I am considering majoring in psychology and this event.... has focused my interests.”

- A student at Austin Community College

Abstract

The international crisis in the use of child soldiers continues to frustrate governments, humanitarian groups, human rights workers and the vast array of other practitioners, policymakers, and researchers who work to end this global calamity. Though children have been used in war since time immemorial, over the past 20 years there has been a dramatic increase in recruiting youth and forcing them into various military roles: from combatants and spies to cooks and porters to sex slaves and “wives” of commanders. As international actors continue to implement strategies at ending the practice, educators have the opportunity to increase student awareness of global issues by teaching about this crisis. Because the child soldier phenomenon is complex and interdisciplinary relative to its root causes, manifestations, and solutions, it lends itself to instruction through a range of academic disciplines. Teaching this crisis demonstrates how one particular global phenomenon has relevancy across a range of traditional academic areas and allows students to consider how they might be able to engage on a personal or professional basis in ending the practice. The objective of this paper is to explore ways in which the child soldier crisis can be used as a means to raising the understanding of global issues in not only the liberal arts, but also career related fields in undergraduate education, especially at the community college level. The particular focus here is in using experiential learning as the pedagogical means. A primer on the crisis is provided followed by ideas for engaging community colleges students about the issue.

Visit most any U.S. college or university campus today, and one is likely to find students who have organized in some fashion to raise awareness about the international crisis in the use of child soldiers. Most international organizations that work to end the practice including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International (AI), and the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (CSC) promote student activism through local chapters or awareness campaigns. The use of new communication means that appeal to college age

populations is also increasingly being employed. For instance, CSC has sponsored a group on Facebook that has over 18,000 members (Facebook, 2008). One of the most popular efforts is Invisible Children, which refers to itself as a “movement” to improve “the quality of life for war-affected children by providing access to quality education, enhanced learning environments, and innovative economic opportunities” originally prompted by the need to end the use of child soldiers in Uganda (Invisible Children, 2008). Invisible Children has traveled to hundreds of colleges and university campuses with its film on the crisis in northern Uganda, musical group, and awareness campaign. Recently, films including the Academy Award nominated *Blood Diamond* based on the Sierra Leonean civil war and *War Dance* examining the lives of Acholi children living in a Ugandan refugee camp have brought needed attention to the issue. The film *Johnny Mad Dog* based on a novel about the experiences of African child soldiers premiered at the 2008 Cannes Film Festival and was awarded the Prize of Hope. Books by former child soldiers such as Ishmael Beah (*A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*), journalists such as Jimmie Briggs (*Innocents Lost: When Child Soldiers Go to War*), and researchers such as Peter Singer (*Children at War*) have provided a range of perspectives on the problem. If a young person had his interest piqued on the subject, he would not need to go far to increase his understanding on the issue.

Though the efforts are by and large factual, there tends to be some generalizing. The case studies are mostly Africa based, giving the impression that the problem is only on one continent, which is not the case. Boys tend to be the focus rather than girls, leading to the belief that only boys are affected, while girls in some zones of conflict are equally and often more seriously impacted. There is also the impression that all child

soldiers suffer from severe mental trauma, when in fact the percentage of full blown post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) cases is less than 10% of the entire child soldier population (Dye, 2007).

At the college level, education in a broad sense can be achieved in two ways: inside and outside the classroom. A central tenet of modern higher education is to provide a balance of both: classes and courses in discrete fields, coupled with outside extra-curricular activities where students can apply their classroom knowledge to the real world. As such this fosters the “yin and yang” necessary to forming a balanced holistic learning environment. This creates a coupling of the more traditional classroom forms of learning that emphasize writing, research, and analytical skills, with experiential-based ones that focus on student engagement, experimentation, and problem-solving.

The international crisis in the use of child soldiers is multifaceted and multidisciplinary, yet generally tends to be explored only in courses and classes that are in the liberal arts. As such, students who may have an interest in the topic, yet are not enrolled in liberal arts courses are not provided with the chance to explore the rich nature of the issue in a structured classroom setting. Classroom exploration gives credibility to an issue, provides a setting whereby the teacher is able to engage and challenge the student on assumptions about the issue, and can contextualize an issue in relation to other serious global problems. Students who only engage in an issue such as the child soldier problem at the level of extra-curricular student activism, may view it as a passing phenomenon and understand it only in terms of its “Hollywoodization.” In community college environments where students are often pursuing education as a means to careers, the child soldier issue can provide them with insights on how they might contribute to

ending the problem through their own vocational objectives. For instance, nursing and law enforcement students in community colleges might focus their careers in international conflict environments rather than domestic ones after being exposed to the child soldier issue.

My interest in this topic stems from my work at the U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) where my responsibilities focus on improving the teaching and learning of global peacebuilding and conflict resolution. USIP views promoting the work of civil society - the array of actors working in the space between formal government and traditional commerce - as the key to building peace and stability, particularly in post-conflict societies. Civil society actors are wide ranging and include media entities, humanitarian groups, education providers, human rights advocates, public health workers, and economic development experts. I often lecture on the child soldier problem to college and university groups of students and faculty, and have led students through experiential activities to get them to understand the full dimension of the crisis. I find, though, that faculty often fail to see the teaching opportunities inherent in the crisis. They fail to engage students in the range of contemporary issues stemming from the problem such as the nature of intractable violence, the proliferation of small arms, the effects of social-psychological trauma, and economic strategies for peace and stability.

I will reflect on some experiential approaches to using the child soldier issue to further explore issues of international conflict, thereby harnessing students' often high awareness, as well as providing faculty with the opportunity to teach about issues of global peace and conflict using contemporary content. My focus is on community colleges often referred as "democracy's colleges" because of their easy accessibility and

diversity where 46% of American undergraduates are studying (American Association of Community Colleges, 2008). I start, however, with a primer on the child soldier issue.

A PRIMER

As long as there has been war, there have been child soldiers. The Bible talks about how young David fought in battle for King Saul. At the battle of Agincourt in 1415, the English were victorious against the French largely because of the use of young boys. During the American Civil War it is estimated that between 10 and 20% of those who fought were under the age of 18. At the Battle of New Market in Virginia in 1864, cadets from the Virginia Military Institute were sent into battle to fight for the Confederacy because the number of military age men had been depleted (Rosen, 2005). History is replete with examples of children being used in battle, however, in most of these cases the use took place under specific circumstances such as when the supply of able-bodied adult men had been exhausted. Using child soldiers was the exception, not the rule.

The end of the Cold War unleashed unparalleled political and social change, as well as new ways on how change was brought about. The result was an increase in intrastate warfare increasingly waged by rag-tag unorganized militia groups. Brutal indiscriminate violence was the means for change by groups that were often economically, culturally, or political marginalized, and frequently manipulated by warlords who saw opportunities for personal gain or political power. War increasingly pitted internal ethnic or cultural groups led by charismatic leaders against each other, or in challenging a weak central authority. These groups had little understanding or respect for normative rules of warfare that required that children not be recruited or targeted. As

a result, children became targets of recruitment and violence. In Sierra Leone during its civil war that started in 1991 and ended 10 years later an estimated 10,000 child soldiers were used (Wessells, 2006). During the Liberian civil war of the early 2000s an estimated 21,000 children fought (Amnesty International, 2004) Some estimate that as many as 80,000 children have been recruited by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda since the late 1980s (Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 2007).

In 1994 Graça Machel was asked by the United Nations to complete a worldwide assessment of the use of child soldiers. Her 1996 report noted:

A series of 24 case studies on the use of children as soldiers ... covering conflicts over the past 30 years, indicate that government or rebel armies around the world have recruited tens of thousands of children. Most are adolescents, though many child soldiers are 10 years of age or younger. While the majority are boys, girls also are recruited. The children most likely to become soldiers are those from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds and those who have become separated from their families. (Machel, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, 1996, p. 42)

Machel cited a breakdown of the distinction between combatants and civilians, horrible levels of brutality including the use of systematic rape, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. In short, with today's warfare there are no standards (Machel, *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children*, 1996).

War today just simply does not match the traditional conception of two opposed armies; or even of an internal conflict pitting an armed opposition force against the established government, in which each side generally abides by the 'rules of

the game,' respecting the basic inviolability of civilian non-combatants and the special protection due to the young. (Machel, *Children in War*, 1996, p. 42)

The former limits that prevented the use of children in war unless the circumstances were dire no longer existed. Cultural prohibitions had been overcome some argued, because of the type of warfare today – in the bush, using small arms, where the need for agility lends it self to youth combatants. Young boys often have unrealistic views of their mortality and can easily be manipulated through drug use. The result was that using child soldiers soon became a chosen strategic and tactical decision by military commanders, guerilla leaders, and in some cases governments.

Today there are still an estimated 250,000 children used as child soldiers in 13 conflict zones (Besheer, 2008). The Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers in its recent worldwide assessment estimated that child soldiers were used in 19 arenas from 2004 through 2007 (see Figure 1) (*Child Soldiers, Global Report 2008*, 2008). The estimated number of children and where they are used sheds little light, however, on how these young people are being used and brutalized during conflict.

Small arms flooding the black market are increasingly designed for nimble hands. Guns are smaller and easier to assemble, load, and clean, giving an operational advantage to a commander sending children, who are psychologically and physically malleable, into battle. Commanders can further maximize the use of children by plying them with narcotics and alcohol and invoking mystical and religious defenses to harm during violent engagement. Children are also used in an array of supporting roles needed to sustain a camp and those in battle including as spies, porters, cooks, and messengers. In the most egregious situations, girls are forced into sexual servitude as “bush wives,” or are

sexually abused at the whims of their military commanders. The consequences of which are high rates of teenage pregnancy frequently compounded by both mother and child becoming HIV/AIDS infected (Wessells, 2006).

The particular circumstance under which a child is conscripted varies. Wessells (2006) distinguishes between “forced recruitment” and “unforced recruitment.” Before examining these various paths to becoming a child soldier, it must be kept in mind that under optimal environmental circumstances young people may have a high degree of “agency,” that is, the ability to make a choice freely under ones own power with minimal coercive influences. In societies that have been devastated by warfare, poverty, and pandemics such as HIV/AIDS where children are the most vulnerable and have often lost their homes, their families, and their means of survival, it is difficult to argue that a child who chooses to join a commander in the bush is doing so under “his own free will” as we might consider in normative situations.

Countries/situations where children were recruited or used in hostilities - April 2004 to October 2007

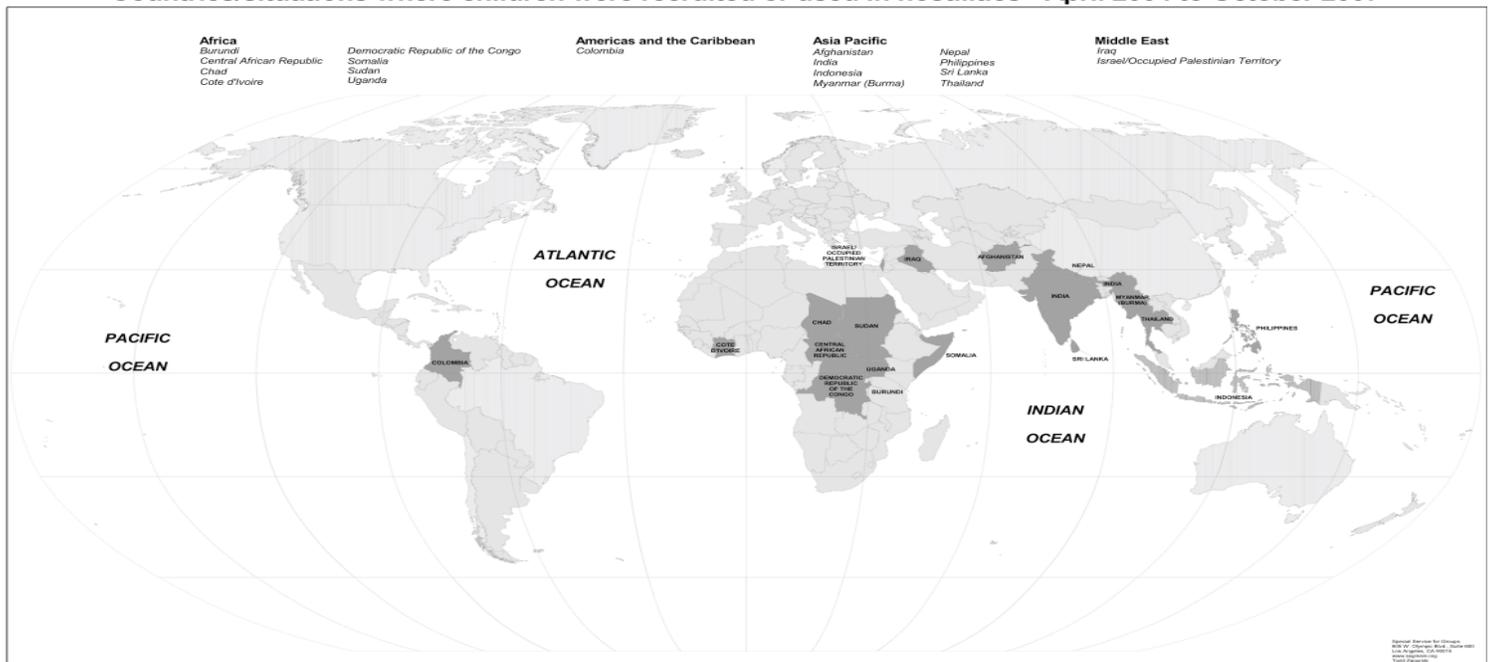


Figure 1

Source: Coalition to End the Use of Child Soldiers

The outright abduction and enslavement of children is the most egregious means to becoming a child soldier. The practice exists at some level in all conflict arenas where child soldiers are used. Abduction can be of an individual or on a mass scale. A particularly horrific example was when Joseph Kony and the LRA captured 139 girls from St. Mary's School in northern Uganda in 1996. He later released all but 30 whom he kept as his personal wives and sex slaves (Briggs, 2005). As one child abducted during the Sierra Leonean war recalls, the abduction event is often a violent one:

I was on my way to the market when a rebel demanded I come with him. The commander said to move ahead with him. My grandmother argued with him. He shot her twice. I said he should kill me too. They tied my elbows behind my back. At the base, they locked me in a toilet for 2 days. When they let me out, they carved the letters RUF (Revolutionary United Front) across my chest. They tied me so it wouldn't rub it until it was healed. (Finken, 2004, p. 28)

Abduction can also take place by press-ganging and recruitment by quota. In the former, commando groups sweep through crowded areas such as markets and "round up youths like fish in a net" (Wessells, 2006, p. 41). Groups particularly target dispossessed children – those who are poor, homeless, and living on the streets. In other circumstances, militia groups will demand that a village or community surrender a specific number of children in return for protection (Wessells, 2006). This approach invokes the image of Mafia style intimidation where businesses must render a fee in order to be spared from violence. As reported to Human Rights Watch, this often begins with an area-wide edict as in this case from Sri Lanka.

Each house had been told to hand over one child. The LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) had already issued the order, but the parents had ignored it.

First, they sent letters, then they started to visit homes. They came to my house and said, “You know about our announcement. Each house has to turn over one child. If you don't agree, we will take a child anyway.” (Wessells, 2006, p. 42)

In considering unforced recruitment, one needs to examine societal and familial factors that create conditions that influence children to join armed groups. Youth are often overpowered by the surrounding events. In war conditions where there is abject poverty and no means of support, family displacement, and lack of basic security “children may find not only a sense of power but also a job and a means of livelihood through association with an armed group” (Wessells, 2006, p. 43).

Military life impresses young boys in particular. The warrior image can be enticing for a child with little education and no stable family life. Life in the bush can provide a sense of belonging and esprit d'corps. In addition, a child soldier can feel useful and develop skills, albeit needed only in the context of war. A Colombian boy of age 15 in an interview with Human Rights Watch stated:

My training was for 4 and ½ months. I learned how to use a compass, how to attack a police post, how to carry out an ambush, and the handling of weapons.

By the end I was using an AK-47, a Galil, an R-15, mortars, pineapple grenades, and M-26 grenades. (Wessells, 2006, p. 68)

The chance to wield military power and dominate others may also be a factor in attracting a child. This may in particular be attractive when the alternative is working in a more tedious environment such as on a farm (Wessells, 2006).

Other factors have also been noted as influencing a child's decision to join a militia group including escaping poverty and homelessness, and revenge for acts against a child's family and group. A child who is on the street may reasonably see the life of a soldier as better than they are currently facing. In powerless environments, a child may view joining a group as a way to seek "justice" for his family's killings (Wessells, 2006).

Finally, the influences of propaganda and political indoctrination can be strong. A child's need to live up to his responsibilities as a member of a specific ethnic or religious group and join the army may be powerful. In some societies, a child's martyrdom is highly valued and respected and will bring honor to a family. For instance, families of Palestinian child suicide bombers are given special status (Rosen, 2005). The influence can be based on nationalism as in the case of the Tamils in Sri Lanka or Palestinians, or could be of a strong religious nature as in the case of the Taliban in Afghanistan (Wessells, 2006).

To search for one unifying reason why a child joins becomes a child soldier may simplify a complex experience and force a reductionist interpretation to motivations that are often interlaced. As Wessells (2006) indicates: "The causes of soldiering are contextual, vary across individuals, and are embedded in wider systems of exploitation and violence" (p. 55).

Though significant attempts are being made by the international community to understand the circumstances that foster the child soldier phenomenon, the major focus of efforts is in hastening the release of child soldiers and promoting the reintegration and healing process. Collectively referred to as demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration or DDR, this process focuses on creating normalcy in a former child

soldier's life. Depending on the experiences of a particular child soldier, the DDR emphasis will vary. In many circumstances, the child has been held for only a short period of time - sometimes a day or two – and as such the need for long-term rehabilitation and medical and psychosocial efforts may be minimal. However, when a child has been in service for an extended period of time, the efforts that must be made are multiple, considerable, and must be started immediately. In addition, broader notions of justice and societal reconciliation must be considered. When a war is ended and child soldiers are released, warlords need to be held accountable for their actions while at the same time efforts must be made to heal deep divisions in the society. Frequently, these objectives appear to be mutually exclusive: warlords will be reluctant to give themselves up and end the fighting unless amnesty or leniency is offered, while human rights advocates will demand the full force of international law. But societal reconciliation cannot start until the violence is halted. On the heels of these immediate needs will be creating a stable and economically sound society that will not slide back into civil war and be once again subject to the whims of military commanders. The work that must be undertaken is truly Herculean.

A child soldier experience robs a young person of the familial security and affection so necessary for development, as well denies him of traditional learning and vocational education that are necessary to be a functioning member of society. A 17-year old coming out of a military environment after 10 years lacks the ability to read and count required to support himself. He will likely suffer from psychosocial trauma that unless treated will impede his ability to live with others. In many cases, and particularly with girls, the child is physically compromised by HIV/AIDS or malnutrition. She may

be also have a young child who is also in medical need. Finally, it is likely that the 17-year old has little or no recollection of his former life either because of the remoteness of time or because of he has repressed the violent acts that he committed or been subjected as part of his recruitment. Notwithstanding, the majority of child soldiers desire to be reunified with their families and communities as soon as possible. For a myriad of reasons, this is not always easily achievable. One of the major impediments is the reluctance of a community to take a child back who has committed violence against his own village. Today, reunification organizations are increasingly seeing the value of indigenous processes and traditions that allow a former child soldier to be “cleansed” so that his community is able to take him back. This is a particularly critical issue with young girls who suffer the stigma of being raped and having children out of wedlock. Recent strategies by the World Bank in using microcredit to assist young women in starting their own businesses have proved effective in demonstrating the economic contributions that a former child soldier could make to her community, which in turn makes the reunification process easier (Dye, 2007).

Today, increasingly researchers and aid groups are coming to understand the inherent resilience of former child soldiers. Though clearly there are children who are traumatized and suffer from PTSD, have acquired serious health problems such as HIV/AIDS and suffered the effects of malnutrition, and have little ability to support themselves beyond using the skills they learned in captivity, the vast majority of children will after a successful DDR process function at a high level. As Wessells (2006) notes:

The vast majority of former child soldiers I have talked with over the past decade do not show signs of chronic dysfunction but are actively adapting to their new

lives and situations. Just as most people naturally find a way to grieve the loss of loved ones and to move ahead with their lives, most war-affected child are not emotional cripples and find away to get on with their lives. To say that children are resilient is not to imply that they are unaffected by the war (citation omitted). (but) by emphasizing deficits and pathology, the trauma focus distracts attention from children's adaptive capacities.... (p. 136)

TEACHING ABOUT CHILD SOLDIERS

In my work at USIP I travel the U.S. lecturing at colleges and universities, often community colleges, on the use of child soldiers. The topic is popular with students and faculty for various reasons, not the least of which is the inherent interest by young people of the plight of other youth in other corners of the world. Often my hosts are faculty who are teaching in the liberal arts, but have not been able to integrate child soldier issues into their course offerings. This is unfortunate, but not unexpected.

In community colleges courses are mostly introductory in nature. General education courses –those classes that form the foundation of a broad-based liberal arts education –come from traditional social sciences disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and political science, and humanities areas such as literature, philosophy, and history. Introductory courses tend to be survey classes and focus less on global perspectives and more on domestic applications of content (unless designed as a “global” oriented course such as Cultural Anthropology or Introduction to International Relations). This is reflected not only in course syllabi, but also in textbooks, which frequently frame the course content and topical order. Even in subjects that might lend themselves well to focusing on the child soldier issue, there often is no coverage of the

issue. Though the textbook *Psychology, 4th Edition* by Saul Kassin and used in introductory community college psychology courses addresses PTSD, the coverage does not refer to the child soldier context (Kassin, 2004). Unfortunately, this book is not the exception. Faculty in the social sciences, humanities, and well as the career and technical fields can bring a global dimension to a course using the child soldier issue as a means of enrichment, but they need to consider strategies beyond the normative lecture, reading, and writing approach that textbooks are designed to facilitate.

Recently I visited Austin Community College in Austin, Texas and spoke on the child soldier issue to a group of about 150 students, faculty, and community members. After my visit, my host, a psychology professor, had her students provide written reflections on my talk. One student submitted the following comments:

The issue of child soldiers has been going on for far too long and in far too many places and it is time to bring a stop to it. Even America used child soldiers during the civil war and 13 countries still use them today. I believe that the first step to creating a change is to get people educated.... I acquired a strong understanding of the facts as well as an understanding of why child soldiers are considered both victims and perpetrators. Prior to this event I had not considered the challenge of reintegrating the children back into normal life and thought that the psychological aspect of reintegration was very interesting....I am considering majoring in psychology and this event.... has focused my interests. (Khosropour, 2008)

This written comment is typical of discussions I often have with many students across the U.S. More often than not the conversation focuses on what a student can do on a personal or professional level in alleviating the problem. This need to direct ones career

plans into this area, or more broadly to humanitarian, development, and aid work, is not limited to students taking liberal arts classes who are intent on transferring to 4-year institutions, but increasingly includes students who are pursuing technical careers in allied health such as nursing, and in criminal and legal related fields such as law enforcement or homeland security. For these students, who may never again see the inside of a college classroom after graduation, exposing them to the child soldier crisis can provide them with a way of framing their careers in a global direction that may result in a commitment to working to end this crisis or similar global problems.

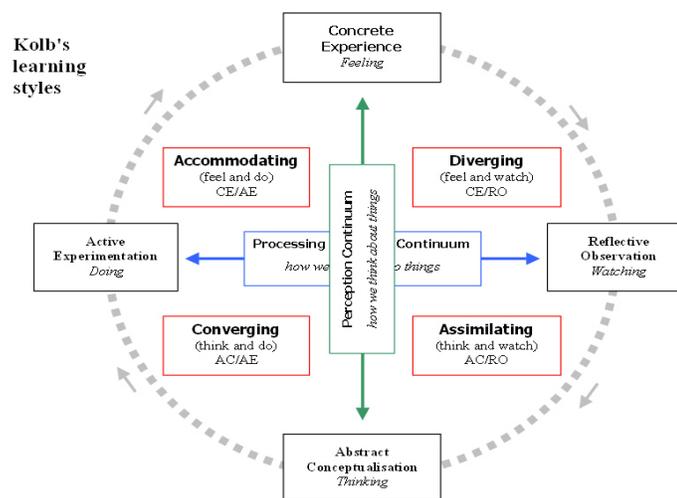
Curricula have been developed to integrate the child soldier issue into the classroom. In some situations, lesson plans have been developed to accompany books already on the market. A “Companion Curriculum” has been produced by Amnesty International USA (AI/USA) to accompany Jimmie Briggs’ *Innocents Lost*. The 40-page guide is divided into five sections: human rights law, small arms trade, girls in conflict, international justice and impunity, and reintegration and recovery. Each part – tied to relevant parts of Briggs’ book - includes a detailed lesson plan that includes handouts, homework, activities, and resources. Though the material could be adapted to a number of educational settings, it is “designed to provide a solid framework for discussing human rights in your classroom” strongly implying use at the secondary level (Amnesty International USA, 2008). AI/USA has also developed curriculum guides to accompany the movies *Blood Diamond* and *War Dance*. Other groups have also developed guides, often designed to support a specific project or activity. USIP developed a “Study Guide for Teachers and Students” to accompany the 2006-2007 National Peace Essay Contest on youth and violent conflict that focused on the child

soldier issue (U.S. Institute of Peace, 2006). The guide presents model units and activities that high school teachers can integrate into a classroom setting to not only support the writing of the essay, but also broadly cover how youth are impacted by intractable conflict. Because it is tied to a high school essay contest it is presented as a guide for “teachers” at the secondary level. By and large the emphasis with most groups working on the area of child soldiers has been to appeal to secondary school audiences. Though most sponsors suggest that their guides could be used in a higher education setting, few specific strategies are provided on how to incorporate activities into discrete career or liberal arts courses. Fortunately, some groups are now starting to consider how to appeal to college audiences. The popular International Committee of the Red Cross/American Red Cross program “Exploring Humanitarian Law” widely used in high schools is currently trying to develop a strategy for community college implementation (Guajardo, 2007).

As institutions with diverse populations, community college faculty are continuously challenged to adapt to changing student learning styles and consider new ways to improve teaching. One of the areas in which community colleges have traditionally focused heavily on is experiential education. As defined by the Association for Experiential Education, “(e)xperiential education is a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values” (Association for Experiential Education, 2008). Experiential education can take many forms including: internships, cooperative education, practicums, service learning, role-plays and simulations, and volunteer activities. John Dewey, considered by many as the father of

experiential learning, believed that meaningful learning can only be accomplished through experience, thereby suggesting that other pedagogical approaches to learning such as lecture, research, and writing, were not successful in bringing about the aims of education (Dewey, 1938).

In *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, David Kolb (1984) presents a model for implementing strategies for learning. For Kolb, as with Dewey, learning is accomplished through experience. Kolb maintains that learning is a process, and not an outcome; continuous and grounded in experience that often requires the resolution of conflicts between different modes of adaptation to our environment; holistic (that is, “involves the integrated functioning of the total organism – thinking, feeling, perceiving, and behaving” [1984, p. 31]); involves transactions between the person and his environment; and is the process of creating knowledge. His learning model is based on a cycle starting from concrete experiences to reflective observations to abstract conceptualization to active experimentation.



© concept4evl kolb, adaptation and design alan chapman 2005-06, based on Kolb's learning styles, 1984
Not to be sold or published. More free online training resources are at www.businessballs.com. Sole risk with user.

Figure 2
Source: www.businessballs.com

Each “stage” of the cycle lends it self to a specific learning style. For him an important notion is that “learning, and therefore knowing, requires both a grasp or figurative representation of experience and some transformation of that representation” (Kolb, 1984, p. 42). For both Dewey and Kolb, the measure of the value of experience is gauged in retrospect in considering the significance of the changed behavior that takes place. Notwithstanding a well-thought out experience by an instructor, if in the end a “transformation of the representation” is not present, the experience would not have met the qualitative nature needed.

Colman McCarthy (2002) in *I'd Rather Teach Peace* shares his experiences teaching peace at six Washington, DC area educational settings ranging from a District of Columbia juvenile facility to Georgetown University law school. His approach is strongly experiential: getting young people to understand how peace can be sustained in their own lives by engaging with those whose lives are most impacted by violence. This often involves field trips to places such as homeless shelters and correctional institutions. He is often frustrated, however, by the attitude of school administrators to his approach.

High school administrators tend to see field trips as larks, fine for grade school kiddies but unproductive after that.... It would help if schools gave credit for service learning. Tutor at a grade school while taking a sociology course.... Or help in a homeless shelter.... Serving food to homeless people in a shelter a mile from the U.S. Capitol is useful, but it can remain idle charity unless accompanied by an awareness of policies inside the Capitol that keep money flowing to build weapons, not affordable housing. (McCarthy, 2002, p. 29)

For McCarthy, a former *Washington Post* columnist who has been running the Center for Teaching Peace since 1981, learning by doing is essential when it comes to teaching about peace. Furthermore, a link between the act that is being taken and the policies this action is meant to expose is critical to new awareness.

McCarthy's view resonates with an argument made by Anthony Bing that "peace action" must be an integral aspect of teaching about peace. Bing notes, in quoting George Lopez, that peace studies, an area that "has dynamism and relevance lacking in traditional fields" must have "an experiential component in which students can engage in or observe the problems" of conflict and peace. He challenges peace studies programs to make better use of experiential education (Bing, 1989, p. 50). Consistent with both Kolb and Dewey, Bing argues for the need for both action and reflection. In quoting Morris Keeton, Bing (1989) contends:

Far more important than learning how to do something is the creation of new knowledge or the transformation of oneself.... One senses a problem, gets an idea, tries it out in its area of applicability, undergoes or experiences the consequences, and confirms or reinterprets theory in the light of those consequences. (p. 51)

In this way, those who study peace and conflict can gain the opportunity to use their experiences to become agents of social change.

An experiential activity is an application of social learning. Bandura (1976), a leading proponent of social learning theory, has argued that "human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide

for action” (p. 22). This can be readily provided as interns model more seasoned colleagues during an experience and in simulations as students model each others’ approaches.

Experiential learning is a means to taking on not only new perspectives and understanding, but also new skills and abilities that provide insights on how to navigate a particular circumstance. A well-designed activity for a particular community college student can provide him with a new way in which to see his contributions in the world, including the crafting of a career path. Taken in the context of child soldiers, using experiential learning can not only increase levels of knowledge, but also increase those working in the field to end its practice.

The best preparation for careers as “first responders” – used to describe any individual who would respond first to a medical or criminal crisis – is placing students in simulated roles in which they need to respond in an appropriate and effective way. Nursing education, in particular, is highly experiential with students engaged in “clinical” courses where they both assist and learn in a clinical setting. The ability to transport students into zones of conflict and have them work “on the ground” in child soldier DDR efforts is logistically impossible for the most part. However, the ability of faculty across a myriad of traditional and career disciplines to create activities that use experience as the means for learning is feasible and could be valuable in increasing both global awareness and demonstrate new career avenues.

As noted earlier, I frequently engage students in short role-play activities to give them the “look and feel” of working in a conflict zone. One of the most transformative experiences I have witnessed is one run by the Summer Institute for International

Disaster Relief and Humanitarian Assistance at Indian River State College (formerly Indian River Community College) in Ft. Pierce, Florida. This program is a 3-day “live” simulation that enlists upwards of 25 students - many from community colleges and in career fields such as nursing and emergency management – to play the roles of humanitarian workers sent to a civil war zone after an earthquake as taken place. During the activity, in which students are continuously in role, they must treat “injured” civilians and set up a medical relief camp, as well as negotiate with soldiers and political leaders who are at best noncooperative and at worst antagonistic and belligerent in an effort to create humanitarian space to get their work done. Before the activity begins I conduct a role-play activity in which students simulate negotiating with a range of military, government, rebel, and civil society members. At the end of the 3-day exercise, I am always struck by the desire of these students to refocus their careers from local pursuits to international ones. Nursing students frequently indicate a strong interest in working for international medical organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, rather than a local hospital.

At a faculty seminar at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington I led a simulation based on the child soldier crisis in Uganda. As part of a 2-day USIP sponsored faculty seminar 30 undergraduates were asked to play a variety of roles in a scenario that focused on bringing food aid to an internal displaced persons (IDP) camp in northern Uganda. The IDP camp was set up to create a safe haven from the LRA and protect children who might be recruited as child soldiers. Roles for students included not only aid workers but also members of the LRA and Ugandan military. Afterwards, students reflected not only on their heightened awareness of the issue, but also on their

interest in engaging in humanitarian work as careers. These experiences demonstrate how a powerful experiential tool – a simulation – can be used with undergraduates. I would argue that other forms of applied learning that engage students in the “doing” can be just as transformational.

Reflecting on the array of introductory courses that are taught in community colleges, using activities that allow students to engage directly on a specific dimension of the child soldier issue is possible. Because the topic itself is particularly multi-disciplinary, a range of social science, humanities, and career fields can examine the child soldier issue. In a psychology course where PTSD is the topic, students could play the role of clinicians interviewing children who have suffered through the experiences of being child soldiers. Here, students are not only able to develop applied skills, but understand the dynamics of PTSD in a context not available in a domestic setting. In a sociology course, a similar approach might be used in having students play members of a society who are faced with their children being abducted by child soldiers and how they should react to the situation. A political science course could have students play the roles of civil society organizations required to develop a post-conflict plan for the reintegration of child soldiers. In an economics course, students could be asked to develop and implement as a case study a development plan for child soldiers, focusing not only on occupational skills but the societal wide economy that is necessary to support them. In a career field such as nursing, trauma and physical injuries that are simulated could relate to the violence, including sexual violence, that young people are subjected to as child soldiers. Finally, criminal justice/law enforcement majors could simulate the actions of human rights groups working in a post-conflict environment that are intent on

apprehending and prosecuting warlords. An activity could be conducting a war crimes trial.

Experiential education provides significant opportunities for faculty teaching undergraduate populations, and particularly community colleges students, to increase understanding of complex multi-disciplinary global issues such as the child soldier crisis. More importantly, when used in vocational curriculum, a well-developed experiential activity may result in students visioning their future career plans in global contexts. As such, an experiential activity allows a student to “try on” a career, develop skills necessary to succeed in the field, challenge theories about the nature of work, and finally develop a level of self-confidence that can propel a community college student into the world of global peacebuilding.

BIOGRAPHY

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